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Art, contemplation and *intellectus*

Aquinas and Gadamer in conversation

Rik Van Nieuwenhove

Introduction: exploring the possibilities of a dialogue between Aquinas and Gadamer

The main theme of this book can be situated broadly on the crossroads between mystical theology and art. Contemplation, which is the topic of this contribution, lies at the very core of this interface. I will make this point by considering the Thomist notion of *contemplatio*, and bring it into dialogue with Gadamer's hermeneutical project, and his views on art in particular (as developed in the first part of *Truth and Method* and in his short treatise *The Relevance of the Beautiful*).

One may wonder, however, whether bringing Gadamer in conversation with Aquinas is actually a meaningful venture. As is well known, many scholars (e.g., Johannes Lotz, Bertrand Rioux, Gustave Siewerth, Max Müller, John Caputo, Jean-Luc Marion, amongst others) have engaged Aquinas in dialogue with Heidegger, and have addressed the question of whether Aquinas is vulnerable to Heidegger's critique of *Seinsvergessenheit* (forgetfulness of being) in particular.[1] The discussion seems to have abated somewhat and this may very well be a welcome development.[2] In my view, a more interesting dialogue could indeed be engendered between Aquinas and Heidegger's pupil, Hans-Georg Gadamer. Admittedly, while both Aquinas and Gadamer are sensitive to the manner in which our thinking is shaped by traditions that precede us, some might doubt whether Aquinas's philosophy can be squared

with Gadamer's historicist and contextual perspective. This is a complex issue, if only because it hinges on the extent to which we are willing to consider Gadamer a realist thinker who makes truth-claims which, no matter how contextualised, nonetheless transcend a particular perspective, and claim universal validity. For all his critique of foundationalism and rational autonomy, and his emphasis upon the contextuality and linguistic nature of human understanding, Gadamer does subscribe to a realist position. In the words of Brice Wachterhauser: 'We simply cannot make sense of human knowledge in all of its relativity to this historically conditioned, linguistically constituted, value-laden standpoints, if we do not see these standpoints as in principle compatible with and in contact with the intelligibility of the world'.[3] Thus, Gadamer is committed to metaphysical views that assume the inherent intelligibility of our world and language. The perspectivist and linguistically and tradition-conditioned outlook of his philosophical stance does not exclude the possibility of a realist position in which we can make claims of universal intent about our world.

Gadamer's critique of the Enlightenment project, its alleged 'presuppositionless' stance and the distancing from, or even disparagement of, the tradition that it implies, and its problematic preoccupation with positivistic methodology not only place him in the company of postmodern thinkers but also allow us to bring him into dialogue with pre-modern thinkers, such as Aquinas, who is obviously free from these Enlightenment presuppositions. Incidentally, while a dialogue between Gadamer and post-modern thought has proven to be a venture which has met with rather mixed success, an engagement with pre-modern thinkers, such as Aquinas, may yield more positive results – which is perhaps not all that surprising given the indebtedness of both Aquinas and Gadamer to the classical Greek tradition.[4]

Scholars who have brought Aquinas in dialogue with Gadamer have mainly focused on how Gadamer draws on Aquinas's theology of the Trinity to address the issue of the forgetfulness of language (cf. the work of John Arthos and David Vessey).[5] More specifically, in the section 'Language and *verbum*' from *Truth and Method*, Gadamer engages with the Trinitarian thought of Augustine and Aquinas as instances of authors who are not guilty of the so-called forgetfulness of language he attributes to Plato and the ensuing tradition.[6] Gadamer takes issue with the Western way of thinking in which (as he sees it) words are mere signs, and no longer *eikons*. The views of Augustine and Aquinas, on the other hand, make clear the intimate link between thought and language: as the *verbum* or Word is begotten from the Father, so too our language expresses our thought. The Christian notion of the Incarnation, which itself must be understood in light of the generation of the inner Word from the Father, challenges the notion of the word as a mere sign of things.[7]

While Gadamer's explicit engagement with Aquinas's theology of the generation of the Word offers a foothold for dialogue between the two thinkers, a whole range of other topics could also be fruitfully examined.

When developing his hermeneutical project Gadamer goes in search of non-modern ways of understanding, which might offer a more hospitable source for the event of understanding as it occurs in the humanities. One of the key sources here is Aristotle's notion of practical wisdom (*phronesis*). As is well known, *phronesis* or *prudentia* occupies a central role in Gadamer's hermeneutical project (which centres on discovering truth in human historicity) – but it is also of central concern to Aquinas's project, especially in the *Second Part* of the *Summa Theologiae* (*ST*). Another possible avenue of research is the exploration of the role of species in Aquinas and language in Gadamer as that through which we understand the world. There is also Gadamer's discussion of the transcendentals in the last part of *Truth and Method* – a part of his writing that has received little scholarly attention. In this chapter, however, I will limit myself to some introductory remarks on the intellective nature of *contemplatio*, as Aquinas characterises it, and bring this into dialogue with Gadamer's views on art and hermeneutics.

1) Aquinas on the beautiful, *intellectus* and contemplation

Although, admittedly, Aquinas has fairly little to say on art and aesthetics, a conversation between Aquinas and Gadamer on beauty and contemplation actually benefits from the fact that Aquinas is writing at a time when aesthetics had not yet grown into an autonomous philosophical discipline. Gadamer considers the very coming into existence of aesthetics in the eighteenth century an indication of the subjectivisation and 'differentiation' of aesthetics – an evolution which he deplores.[8]

For Aquinas, therefore, aesthetics is still deeply embedded into a metaphysical framework. This can be illustrated by *ST* I, q.5, a.4 *ad* 1. The article deals with the question whether goodness is to be associated with final causality. Aquinas prefers to associate goodness with final causality (as that which draws us), and beauty with formal causality. The latter connection is not surprising. In Latin *forma* (the form or essence of a thing) and *formosus* (beautiful) are closely related.[9] One objection, however, quotes *The Divine Names* ch. IV by Pseudo-Dionysius who had associated goodness with beauty, and hence suggests that goodness is connected with formal rather than final causality. Aquinas replies:

> Beauty and goodness in a thing are identical fundamentally; for they are based upon the same thing, namely, the form; and consequently goodness is praised as beauty. But they differ logically, for goodness properly belongs to the appetite (goodness being what all things desire); and therefore it has the aspect of an end (the appetite being a kind of movement towards a thing). On the other hand, beauty relates to the cognitive faculty; for beautiful things are those which please when seen. *(Pulchrum autem respicit vim cognoscitivam, pulchra enim dicuntur quae visa placent)*. Hence beauty consists in due proportion; for the senses

> delight in things duly proportioned, as in what is after their own kind – because even sense is a sort of reason *(nam et sensus ratio quaedam est)*, just as is every cognitive faculty. Now since knowledge is by assimilation, and similarity relates to form, beauty properly belongs to the nature of a formal cause.[10]

In this quotation Aquinas first acknowledges that beauty and goodness are both based on the form of things, which is why Pseudo-Dionysius associates goodness with beauty. This explains, for instance, why we call virtues beautiful (e.g., 'Honesty is a beautiful trait'). However, there is a difference: goodness is associated with final causality (what we desire), while we simply delight in things of beauty we apprehend. Each thing has its form, which is characterised by due proportion or harmony, as well as clarity and integrity or perfection.[11] We should not take these characteristics in too literal or straightforward a manner. For instance, when Aquinas mentions *claritas* he has more in mind than simply brightness. He means something more profound and more ontological: the form is that through which each thing radiates and displays its inherent splendour as a created thing. Indeed, its beauty ultimately participates in the beauty of God himself.[12] Associating beauty and goodness with formal and final causality respectively seems reasonable: when contemplating the inner splendour of a thing of beauty we do not necessarily aim to possess it. There is an element of gratuity in our encounter with beauty which is absent from our attraction towards goodness.

The quotation illustrates that Aquinas emphasises the cognitive aspect of beauty as that which pleases *when apprehended*.[13] This is in marked contrast to later modern subjectivist and experientialist understandings of art (what Gadamer calls *Erlebniskunst*). Given the fact that the beautiful is subsumed in goodness and that truth (the object of intellect) and goodness (the object of the appetitive power) inhere in one another, Aquinas is happy to attribute a cognitive dimension to the contemplation of beauty:[14]

> The beautiful is the same as the good, and they differ in aspect only. For since good is what all seek, the notion of good is that which calms the desire; while the notion of the beautiful is that which calms the desire, by being seen or known (*quod in eius aspectu seu cognitione quietur appetitus*). Consequently those senses chiefly regard the beautiful, which are the most cognitive, namely, sight and hearing, as ministering to reason; for we speak of beautiful sights and beautiful sounds. [. . .] Thus it is evident that beauty adds to goodness a relation to the cognitive faculty.[15]

In the encounter with beauty intellect and will co-inhere in the contemplative act. Gazing at things of beauty constitutes a privileged form of contemplation: just as the beatific vision culminates in delight, so does the apprehension of a thing of beauty. Although Aquinas never states it explicitly, I do not think that the claim that contemplation extends to the realm of aesthetics as well,

especially to things of visual and auditory beauty (music, poetry), is at odds with the central insights of Thomism. After all, truth (the object of intellect) and goodness (the object of the appetitive power) mutually include each other: 'Truth is something good, otherwise it would not be desirable; and good is something true, otherwise it would not be intelligible'.[16] While things of beauty offer a medium of contemplation insofar as they are goodness that can be seen or apprehended, Aquinas further claims that a life of contemplation can be called beautiful in its own right. In *ST* II – II, q.180, a. 2 *ad* 3 he explains that there is beauty in the contemplative life because the very operation of our intellectual faculties in our encounter with beauty is essential in disclosing the clarity and due proportion that characterises it.[17]

Although it must be admitted that Aquinas does not treat beauty extensively, and the contemplation of things beautiful even less so, there are sufficient points of convergence between his intellective notion of contemplation and Gadamer's non-subjectivist notion of art as event which discloses truth to generate a dialogue between our two authors. I will now discuss Aquinas's views on contemplation and *intellectus* before returning to Gadamer.

Aquinas, following his sources in Boethius and Pseudo-Dionysius, distinguishes between two acts of the one power of understanding, namely *ratio* (discursive reasoning) and *intellectus* (intellect or understanding):

> Reason and intellect in man cannot be distinct powers. We shall understand this clearly if we consider their respective actions. For to understand is simply to apprehend intelligible truth: and to reason is to advance from one thing understood to another, so as to know an intelligible truth. And therefore angels, who according to their nature, possess perfect knowledge of intelligible truth, have no need to advance from one thing to another; but they apprehend the truth simply and without mental discursion, as Pseudo-Dionysius says (*Div. Nom.* VII). But man arrives at the knowledge of intelligible truth by advancing from one thing to another; and therefore he is called rational. Reasoning, therefore, is compared to understanding, as movement is to rest, or acquisition to possession; of which one belongs to the perfect, the other to the imperfect.[18]

As I have tried to show elsewhere, when making the distinction between *intellectus* and *ratio*, which is central to his notion of contemplation as *intuitus simplex*, Aquinas invariably draws on the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius and Boethius, and does not refer to Aristotle.[19] Within the confines of this contribution it may suffice to say that the act of *intellectus* is to apprehend intelligible truth, whereas to reason is discursive, i.e., it involves movement and a reasoning process, so as to come to know an intelligible truth. For this reason, Aquinas compares reasoning to movement and understanding to rest or possession.[20] A reasoning process, if successful, *culminates* in the moment of insight, 'when the penny drops', in colloquial English. Those moments of

insight are a dimension of intellect (*intellectus*), not reason. Again, reason can only *begin* to operate in light of certain truths which it simply accepts but cannot argue for in a discursive manner. For instance, the principle of non-contradiction, a key axiom in traditional logic, is a truth which we can perceive in an intellective manner, not in a rational manner. Human reason or *ratio* thus operates against an intellective horizon, and is quite literally unthinkable without it.[21] It has a self-transcendent dynamic to it, and is surrounded by truths which we can perceive or see in an intellective or, if you like, intuitive manner, without discursive reasoning or analysis. The very fact that we speak, in English, of 'insight' (German: *Einsicht*; Dutch: *Inzicht*), alludes to the fact that the intellect can simply see or perceive things.

It is important to note that it is not simply the case that *ratio* needs the insight of *intellectus* to *generate* the reasoning process; nor is it simply the case that this reasoning process finally *results* in a moment of intellective insight. Rather, the process of human understanding implies a to-and-fro movement of insight and reasoning.[22] In other words, when we are engaged in profound intellectual activity, struggling, for instance, to interpret a text or solve a theoretical problem, there will be a to-and-fro movement between intellective insight and searching, discursive reason. This dynamic at the heart of intellect and reason coheres well with Gadamer's analysis of interpreting the art-work as play, characterised by a similar to-and-fro movement, as we will see.

Now, contemplation is deeply intellective as distinct from rational-discursive. When contemplating, discursive reasoning must be put aside and the gaze of the soul must be fixed on the contemplation of the one simple truth.[23] In his early III *Sent*. d.35 q.1, a.2 qc. 2 Aquinas spells out the significance of a simple, intellective grasp for contemplation in greater detail:

> The contemplative life consists in the activity that one assumes (*acceptat*) above all others. [. . .] Now, the inquiry of reason *(inquisitio rationis)* proceeds from a simple regard of the intellect *(a simplici intuitu intellectus progreditur)* – for one proceeds by starting out from principles which the intellect holds; so too the intellect attains certainty when the conclusions it draws can revert back to the principles through which the intellect attained certainty. This is why the contemplative life consists primarily in the operation of the intellect *(Et ideo vita contemplativa principaliter in operatione intellectus consistit)*: the very word 'contemplation' suggests this as it denotes 'vision.' The contemplative person, however, uses rational inquiry *(inquisitione rationis)* so as to attain the vision of contemplation, which is his main goal.

As this quotation suggests, Aquinas associates contemplation proper with an intellective 'simple regard', gaze (*intuitus*), or vision, which is ultimately non-discursive. While contemplation in the strict sense is clearly intellective, it does involve, for human beings, a rational-discursive process (as the last

sentence of the quotation suggests). It is the specifically intellective aspect *(actus intellectus)* – as distinct from the rational-discursive dimension *(actus rationis)* – which is characteristic of contemplation: 'according to the Philosopher in Bk X of his *Ethics* we share the contemplative life with God. Now, we do not share with God discursive reasoning *(inquisitio rationis)* but rather the insight of intellect *(intuitus intellectus)*'.[25] Or again: 'Contemplation consists in the simple gaze of the intellect upon a truth *(contemplatio pertinet ad ipsum simplicem intuitum veritatis)*'.[26] Thus, when contemplating, discursive reasoning must be put aside and the gaze (*intuitus*) of the soul must be fixed on the contemplation of the one simple truth.[27] The claims that there is an intellective dimension to human understanding (rather than a merely rational-discursive one), which we share, to some extent, with higher intelligences, and, secondly, that it is this intellective dimension, understood as a simple gazing on the truth, which he considers to be the characteristic feature of contemplation, were to be Aquinas's constant teaching until the end of his life.

The contrast between discursivity of *ratio* and restfulness of *intellectus* suggests that contemplation is also beyond ordinary time marked by discursiveness and succession.[28] Contemplation is further characterised by a purely receptive approach to reality, disinterested and independent of all practical aims of the active life. It is pursued for its own sake (*contemplatio maxime quaeritur propter seipsam*) and is not subject to any other goal.[29] It consists in 'a certain liberty of mind (*libertas animi*)', in 'leisure and rest'.[30] Given these features it is not surprising that Aquinas explicitly associates contemplation with play (which is pursued for its own sake) and feasting.[31] In *Sent*. I, d.2 q.1, a.5 *Expos*. Aquinas alludes to this connection between contemplation and play: 'Because of the leisure of contemplation (*otium contemplationis*) the Scripture says of the divine Wisdom itself that it plays all the time, plays throughout the world' (Prov. 8:30). Similarly, in his Prologue to his *Commentary on Boethius's De Hebdomadibus* he writes:

> There are two features of play which make it appropriate to compare the contemplation of wisdom to playing. First, we enjoy playing, and there is the greatest enjoyment of all to be had in the contemplation of wisdom. As Wisdom says in Ecclesiasticus 24:27, 'My spirit is sweeter than honey'. Secondly, playing has no purpose beyond itself; what we do is done for its own sake. And the same applies to the pleasure of wisdom.

Let us summarise our discussion of Aquinas: first, I suggested that things of beauty can act as a privileged medium for contemplation, given the fact that beauty is goodness which can be apprehended or beheld; there is a cognitive dimension to things of beauty. I then drew attention to the distinction between *ratio* and *intellectus*. The former is discursive, while *intellectus* is more intuitive, an immediate apprehension of truth. I made the point that contemplation, as Aquinas sees it, is predominantly intellective, although the

intellective insight always presupposes discursive reasoning, as well as a return to the phantasmata and the senses (a topic I cannot develop here).[32] So there is a dialectical relation between discursive reasoning, and intellective insight, generating a to-and-fro movement between reasoning and insight. I further pointed out that contemplation, in its intellective dimension, is beyond ordinary time (the flash of insight), and intuitive and synthetic (you grasp something as a meaningful and coherent whole in one single apprehension). It is also being pursued for its own sake, in contrast to the active life. I will now discuss Gadamer's views on *theoria* and art as play, symbol and festival.

2) Gadamer on art and *theoria*

As is well known, one of the central concerns of Gadamer's writings is the legitimacy and integrity of understanding as it takes place in the humanities. It is this concern that drives his hermeneutical project, and is the foundation for its claims of universality: when interpreting 'texts' (in the broad sense of the word) we engage in understanding.

Understanding is deeply dialogical for Gadamer – in the first place it implies a dialogue between the reader and the text; but the reader or interpreter herself is in conversation with tradition(s) and pre-understandings, which do not hinder interpretation but rather render it possible.[33] In his work, *The Relevance of the Beautiful*, Gadamer refers to the phenomena of play, symbol and festivity so as to illuminate the ontological nature of art. As hinted at earlier, for Gadamer this is part of a broader project: his aim is to show that the subjectivisation of art, in which art is reduced to some variety of personal experience, is an unwelcome reductionism. Drawing on Heidegger, Gadamer argues that the work of art is an *event* which discloses truth. Therefore, art should not be primarily understood in terms of feelings or personal experience but rather in terms of what the art work as an *event* is able to disclose – and disclosure or bringing out of concealment is what truth does for Heidegger.[34] This discussion of art as an event of truth assists Gadamer in safeguarding the integrity of the humanities in an intellectual climate which has largely succumbed to a positivistic methodology ('social sciences'). The experience of art, so Gadamer argues, contains a claim to truth which is different from that of science, but is not inferior to it. Because there is specific truth in art, he can further claim that the mode of being of the work of art can assist us in revealing the nature of understanding in general, which is an essential aspect of his overall hermeneutical project. I hope to suggest that Gadamer's reference to art as play, symbol and festival complements and coheres well with our previous outline of what Aquinas has to say on the nature of contemplation.

3) Art as play, symbol and festival

Gadamer identifies a number of characteristics of play. First, it is dynamic, full of inner movement and tension. Gadamer mentions the to-and-fro of constantly repeated movement in play (e.g., a child bouncing a ball), or the ebbing and flowing of a competitive game of football. This proves a significant analogy, not just in relation to the piece of art itself but also in relation to the nature of interpretation. After all, interpretation for Gadamer is always dialogical in character, as a process in which truth arises in the to-and-fro of question and response.

Secondly, play is characterised by a non-purposive rationality: when playing, we engage in an activity for its own sake, which has its own set of rules and logic. Thus, the game masters the players. What Gadamer means by this is that the real subject of the game is not the player but the play itself.[35] Play invites spectators to participate, 'to play along' because we are captured by what is intended in the game, 'even if it is not something conceptual, useful, or purposive'. In contrast to 'the subjective turn in aesthetics' which he associates especially with Kant, Gadamer wants to focus on 'the mode of being of the work of art itself'.[36] Play contains its own sacred seriousness, and somebody who does not take the game seriously is a spoilsport. So play only fulfils its purpose if the player loses himself in play. There is therefore an important element of self-forgetfulness in play, and I will return to this momentarily. Play demands our undivided attention and commitment for the very reason that we merely participate in an event of play which has primacy over the consciousness of the players. As Gadamer states in *Truth and Method*: 'The structure of play absorbs the player into itself, and thus frees him from the burden of taking the initiative [. . .] The real subject of the game [. . .] is not the player but instead the game itself. What holds the player in its spell, draws him into play, and keeps him there is the game itself'.[37] In other words: the player experiences the game as a reality that surpasses her.[38] The players are not the subjects of play but play itself reaches presentation (*Darstellung*) through the players.

Having developed the analogy of play to uncover the ontology of the work of art, Gadamer examines art as 'symbol'. He reminds us that a symbol originally referred to *tessera hospitalis*, an object broken in two, whereby one was kept by one person, and the other half was given to a guest or friend. A descendant of the guest could enter the house, and the two pieces could be fitted together again to form a whole in an act of recognition.[39] Thus, the element of recognition is essential: the symbol is 'that other fragment that has always been sought in order to complete and make whole our own fragmentary life'.[40] Insofar as it is symbolic, art is 'the invocation of a potentially whole and holy order of things'. In our encounter with art our ontological place in the world, and our finitude before that which transcends us, is revealed.[41]

Against Hegel, Gadamer asserts that the meaning that is revealed can never be fully grasped in concepts or knowledge. Following Heidegger's

alethiological understanding of truth, Gadamer further claims that art does not simply reveal but conceals as well.[42] In Gadamer's view, this is due to our finitude, which precludes a reductionism of the 'ontological fullness' of the artistic creation to graspable meaning: 'The symbolic does not simply point toward a meaning but rather allows that meaning to present itself'.[43] It 'represents', i.e., it makes present again. Insofar as it is symbolic, art is 'the invocation of a potentially whole and holy order of things'.

Thirdly, Gadamer's discussion of art as festival is particularly relevant in relation to the issue of temporality. During the celebration of festivals time is 'fulfilled' or autonomous. We cease to calculate time in terms of weeks and months which are to be 'filled' with something, lest we have nothing to do. Like a festival, the work of art 'proffers time, arresting it and allowing it to tarry. [. . .] The calculating way in which we normally manage and dispose of our time is, as it were, brought to a standstill'.[44] Or as he puts it in a conversation with Carsten Dutt:

> The *Weile* [the 'while' in *Verweilen*, tarrying] has this very special temporal structure – a temporal structure of being moved, which one nevertheless cannot describe merely as duration, because duration means only further movement in a single direction. This is not what is determinative in the experience of art. In it we tarry, we remain with the art structure [*Kunstgebilde*], which as a whole then becomes ever richer and more diverse [. . . W]e learn from the work of art to tarry.[45]

While the purpose of Gadamer's discussion of art in terms of play, symbol and festival is to resist an experientialist subjectivised interpretation of art he does acknowledge that the human subject requires a certain disposition, which we can best characterise as self-forgetful contemplation:

> We started by saying that the true being of the spectator, who belongs to the play of art, cannot be adequately understood in terms of subjectivity, as a way that aesthetic consciousness conducts itself. But this does not mean that the nature of the spectator cannot be described in terms of being present at something, in the way we pointed out. Considered as a subjective accomplishment in human conduct, being present has the character of being outside of oneself. [. . . [B]eing outside of oneself is the positive possibility of being wholly with something else. This kind of being present is a self-forgetfulness *(Solches Dabeisein hat den Charakter der Selbstvergessenheit)*, and to be a spectator consists in giving oneself in self-forgetfulness to what one is watching. Here self-forgetfulness is anything but a privative condition, for it arises from devoting one's full attention to the matter at hand, and this is the spectator's own positive accomplishment.[46]

Gadamer links self-forgetfulness with contemplation, *Θεωρία* (the Greek equivalent of *contemplatio*; it is derived from the Greek verb *theorein*,

meaning 'to contemplate' or 'to gaze') and even *ekstasis*. He makes the point that *theoria* is not to be conceived primarily as 'subjective conduct, as a self-determination of the subject, but in terms of what it is contemplating. Theoria is not something active but something passive (pathos), namely being totally involved in and carried away by what one sees'.[47] He further argues that self-forgetfulness, necessary to appreciate the work of art or understand the text, also leads to some kind of self-discovery or better: self-recognition through an encounter with the otherness of what has a claim over us (the work of art, a text, etc.):[48]

> A spectator's ecstatic self-forgetfulness corresponds to his continuity with himself. Precisely that in which one loses oneself as a spectator demands that one grasp the continuity of meaning. For it is the truth of our own world – the religious and moral world in which we live – that is presented before us and in which we recognise ourselves. [. . .] What rends him from himself at the same time gives him back the whole of his being.[49]

This self-forgetfulness is more than abandoning all references to practical or goal-oriented concerns, although it certainly involves that as well. Through the self-forgetfulness we begin to understand our world and ourselves – which is why Gadamer rehabilitates the classic idea that knowledge (cognition) is ultimately recognition.

In passing I would like to observe that this kind of self-forgetfulness is not necessarily merely intellectual. It can also be interpreted in a broader vein in terms of dispossession of will and desire. Neither Gadamer nor Aquinas pursued this line of thought – but Meister Eckhart did. Mystical theologians such as Eckhart, Ruusbroec, John of the Cross, Ignatius of Loyola, Simone Weil, amongst others, have made clear that detachment (or radical dispossessiveness of self) enables us to engage with the world in an authentic manner. By letting go of our own self-preoccupied concerns we can begin to be truly involved with the world as it is. This suggests that there is deep congruity between the mystical-theological ideal of detachment, on the one hand, and the non-instrumentalist, 'disinterested' manner characteristic of the aesthetic attitude.[50] Both the encounter with art and God involve a kind of renunciation of self, which further illustrates that contemplating works of art can act as a *praeparatio evangelica.*

While it would be incorrect to attribute the language of 'self-forgetfulness' that Gadamer associates with *theoria* to Aquinas's own notion of contemplation, his notion of *intellectus* does have connotations of receptivity and openness to reality. In *De veritate* 15.1 Aquinas contrasts reason and intellect as movement relates to rest, and generation to being (*esse*). It is therefore *intellectus* which enables us to attend to being, to be really present to reality. As Pierre Rousselot made clear many years ago in his book *L'Intellectualisme de Saint Thomas*, it is through *intellectus* that we acquire the contemplative openness to what is really real.[51] According to Aquinas the

word *intellectus* is derived from reading (*legit*) the truth within (*intus*) the very essence of things.[52] *Intellectus* thus denotes an openness or receptivity as to how things essentially are. Moreover, in light of this notion of *intellectus* as openness towards being we can begin to understand Aquinas's notion of truth, which he defines as *adaequatio intellectus et rei.* As is well-known, it would be a mistake to translate this in terms of correspondence, as if there were two parallel tracks, mind and reality, and we can at best hope that the two might meet. Such an understanding of truth in terms of correspondence between intellect and reality is Cartesian rather than Thomist. A better translation would be 'assimilation' of intellect and reality. In his *Commentary on John*, 18:38 (no. 2365) Aquinas speaks of *commensuratio rei ad intellectum*, a conformity between reality and intellect: on the one hand, things conform to the divine intellect, which creates them; on the other hand, our intellect conforms to things, when we truly understand them.

Conclusion

Contemplation of art can assist us in gaining an understanding of our world and ultimately (insofar as this is possible in this world), catching a glimpse of God's splendour. Let us return briefly to the main topic of this book: the encounter between art and mystical theology.

In the last thirty years scholars have questioned whether mysticism is best understood in terms of an immediate experience of God (as William James proposed in his book *The Varieties of Religious Experience*).[53] We have become more sensitive to the fact that our encounter with God is always mediated through faith, hope and love, offering us a lens through which we may encounter God in liturgical settings, the created world, fellow-humans, suffering and art. This shift in perspective – away from a subjectivist-experientialist interpretation of mystical theology – finds an interesting analogy in our appraisal of theories of art, where a similar shift has taken place. Simplifying matters we can say that in the nineteenth century aesthetics was mainly understood in terms of expressivism or emotivism. Tolstoy's essay 'What is Art?' has given an eloquent expression of this experientialist or even emotivist understanding of art. Basically Tolstoy argued that art is a mere medium through which the subjective emotions of the artist are being transferred to the listener (reader, spectator). This reduces the work of art to a mere channel of feelings.

In the twentieth century philosophers have distanced themselves from this romanticist notion of art and have espoused a more cognitivist approach, which considers art in terms of its power to disclose our world and enhance our understanding of it.[54] It will have become clear that Gadamer, with his critique of subjectivist-experientialist understandings of art (*Erlebniskunst*) shares this anti-subjectivist stance, and prefers to see the artwork as an event which reveals our world. This anti-modern stance makes a dialogue with pre-

modern authors, such as Aquinas, an exciting and viable venture. Aquinas was writing at a time when aesthetics was still deeply embedded in a metaphysical framework and thus concerns itself with the most profound questions of being, truth, goodness and beauty. It is for this reason that I have attempted to bring Gadamer's thought on art and *theoria* into dialogue with Aquinas's views on intellect and contemplation, even though as I admitted earlier, Aquinas says little enough about art, and contemplation of art in particular.

Gadamer mentions a number of characteristics that reveal the 'event-ful' nature of interpreting art. He describes art in terms of (a) *play* (pursued for its own sake, characterised by an inner to-and-fro dynamic); (b) *symbol* (as a way of integrating our fragmented world); and (c) *festivity* (its timelessness). These three characteristics cohere well with what Aquinas has to say on intellective contemplation as (a) leisurely or pursued for its own sake, playful and predicated on the on-going dynamic of *ratio* and *intellectus*; (b) intuitive and integrative; and (c) beyond discursive time. This means that Gadamer's hermeneutical project (including his notion of interpretation in terms of on-going dialogue) could be enriched by an engagement with Aquinas's anthropology, and his understanding of the dialectic between *ratio* and *intellectus* in particular. An engagement with the Thomist distinction between *intellectus* and *ratio* could thus further enhance Gadamer's attempt to describe 'the dialogue that we are'.[55]

Notes

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[1] Johannes Baptist Lotz, *Martin Heidegger und Thomas von Aquin: Mensch, Zeit*, Sein (Freiburg: Herder, 1975); Bertrand Rioux, *L'Etre et la verité chez Heidegger et Thomas d'Aquin* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1963); Gustave Siewerth, *Das Schicksal der Metaphysik vom Thomas zu Heidegger* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1959); John Caputo, *Heidegger and Aquinas: An Essay in Overcoming Metaphysics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1982); Jean-Luc Marion, 'Saint Thomas d'Aquin et l'onto-théologie', *Revue Thomiste*, 95 (1995), 31–67.

[2] My reservations, broadly speaking, in regard to this debate are inspired by Aquinas's profound apophaticism, his insistence that God's *esse* radically transcends *esse commune* and is not in any genus; his teaching on analogy; the fact that Aquinas himself appears to anticipate the revelatory or 'disclosing' character of truth that is central to Heidegger's notion of *aletheia* [as in *De veritate* I, 1, where Aquinas quotes St Hilary of Poitier's definition of the true as 'that which manifests and proclaims existence' and continues with a citation from Augustine: 'Truth is that by which that which is, is shown' (*verum est declarativum et manifestativum esse*)], and finally, his notion of *intellectus* itself, which as Pierre Rousselot argued denotes receptivity to being, as I will point out later in this contribution: Pierre Rousselot, *L'Intellectualisme de saint Thomas/Intelligence: Sense of Being, Faculty of God*, trans. by Andrew Tallon (Milwaukee: The Marquette University Press, 1999). This understanding of *intellectus* as openness to being allows us to address Heidegger's admittedly rather sweeping critique of *Seinsvergessenheit* and onto-theology. It was Heidegger's stated aim to merge thought and being; but it is arguably exactly in the unity of *intellectus* and *esse* that this union is achieved, and this union is truth, which reveals or discloses being (cf. also Caputo, *Heidegger and Aquinas*, p. 256).

[3] Brice Wachterhauser, 'Getting It Right: Relativism, Realism and Truth', in *The Cambridge Companion to Gadamer*, ed. by Robert Dostal (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 52–78 (p. 76).

[4] I have in mind both the 'dialogue' between Gadamer's thought and post-modern philosophy (with which he shares a scepticism of both subjectivity, foundationalism, and autonomy of reason), and the actual meeting of Gadamer and Derrida in Paris in 1981. Richard Bernstein comments: 'It was clearly Gadamer's intention to explore the differences between hermeneutics and deconstruction in his face-to-face encounter with Derrida. But a serious intellectual encounter never really happened'. Richard Bernstein, 'Hermeneutics, Critical Theory, and Deconstruction', in *The Cambridge Companion to Gadamer*, pp. 267–82 (p. 276).

[5] Cf. John Arthos, *The Inner Word in Gadamer's Hermeneutics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009); David Vessey, 'Gadamer, Augustine, Aquinas, and Hermeneutic Universality', *Philosophy Today*, 55 (2011), 158–65.

[6] Hans Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Sheed and Ward, 1993), pp. 418–28.

[7] The forgetfulness of language thus refers to the fact that the intimate unity between language and thought has been severed. It is predicated on the notion that words are mere signs for things and ideas. Language, then, becomes a mere instrument of thought. Gadamer disagrees with this account: 'A word is not just a sign. In a sense that is hard to grasp, it is also something almost like a copy of image. [. . .] A word has a mysterious connection with what it 'images'; it belongs to its being. [. . .] the ideality of the meaning lies in the word itself. It is meaningful already. [. . .] We seek the right word – i.e., the word that really belongs to the thing – so that in it the thing comes into language'. (Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, pp. 416–17). According to Gadamer, the Christian idea of the generation and Incarnation of the Word prevented the forgetfulness of being that characterised Greek thought (*Truth and Method*, p. 418, ff.).

[8] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 42, ff.: 'from the classical period up to the age of the baroque art was dominated by quite other standards of value than that of being experienced' (*Truth and Method*, p. 71). Gadamer decries the phenomenon of 'aesthetic differentiation' that accompanies the modern (eighteenth-century) understanding of art, i.e., the original religious or secular function and context in which the work of art is rooted, is being disregarded and it becomes a 'pure work of art' (*Truth and Method*, p. 85). Through this 'differentiation' the work loses its place and the world to which it belongs and now pertains to 'aesthetic consciousness' (*Truth and Method*, p. 87).

[9] Or again, Augustine connected the words *speciosus* (beautiful) and *species*, which he associated with form.

[10] All translations from Thomas Aquinas's writings are from <http://dhspriory.org/thomas/> [accessed 11 April 2017], with the exception of those from his *Commentary on the Divine Names* and The Commentary on the Sentences, which are my own.

[11] Cf. *ST* I, q.39, a.8.

[12] *Commentary on The Divine Names* IV, 7: 'the beauty of creatures is simply a likeness of the divine beauty in which things participate'. Thomas Aquinas, *De divinis nominibus Dionysii*, <www.corpusthomisticum.org/iopera.html> [accessed 23 April 2017].

[13] *ST* I-II, q.27, a.1 *ad* 3.

[14] *ST* I, q.79, a.11, *ad* 2: 'Truth and good include one another (*se invicem includunt*); for truth is something good, otherwise it would not be desirable; and good is something true, otherwise it would not be intelligible'.

[15] *ST* I-II, q.27, a.1 *ad* 3.

[16] *ST* I, q.79, a.11 *ad* 2.

[17] 'Beauty, as stated above (II-II, q.145, a.2) consists in a certain clarity and due proportion. Now each of these is found radically in the reason; because both the light that makes beauty seen, and the establishing of due proportion among things belong to reason. Hence since the contemplative life consists in an act of the reason, there is beauty in it by its very nature and essence; wherefore it is written (Wis. 8:2) of the contemplation of wisdom: "I became a lover of her beauty"'.

[18] *ST* I, q.79, a.8. Boethius and Pseudo-Dionysius appear to be Aquinas's most important source for the contrast between intellect and reason: cf. *ST* I, q.79, a.10 *ad* 2.

[19] See also *De veritate* 24.3 *ad* 1: 'Reason is sometimes taken broadly for any immaterial cognition; and in this sense reason is found in God [. . .]. It is also taken properly, as meaning a power which knows with discourse *(cum discursu)*. In this sense reason is not found in God or the angels, but only in men'. Other key texts which emphasise the distinction between *ratio* and *intellectus* include: I *Sent.* d.3 q.4, a.1 *ad* 4 (with a reference to Pseudo-Dionysius); II *Sent.* d.9 q.1, a.8 *ad* 1 (Pseudo-Dionysius); *De veritate* 5.1 *ad* 5 (with a reference to Boethius); 8.15 (Pseudo-Dionysius); 15.1 (Boethius and Pseudo-Dionysius); 24.3 (no reference); *Expos. De Trin.* q.2, a.2 (no reference) q.6, a. 1 (Boethius); *ST* I, q.58, a.3 (no reference) and a.4 (Pseudo-Dionysius); I, q. 59, a.1 *ad* 1 (no reference); I, q.79, a.8 (Pseudo-Dionysius); *ST* I, q.79 a.8 *ad* 2 (Boethius); II–II, q. 8, a.1 obj. 2 (Pseudo-Dionysius); I, q. 83, a.4 (no reference); II–II, q. 9, a.1 *ad* 1 (no reference); II-II, q.180, a.3 (Pseudo-Dionysius). For a more in-depth discussion, see Rik Van Nieuwenhove, 'Contemplation, *intellectus* and *simplex intuitus* in Aquinas: Recovering a Neoplatonic Theme', *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, 91 (2017), 199–225.

[20] *ST* I, q.79, a.8; see also Aquinas's *Commentary on Boethius' De Trinitate*, Question 6 art. 1, reply to the third question: *Thomas Aquinas. The Division and Methods of the Sciences*, trans. by Armand Maurer (Toronto: PIMS, 1986), pp. 70–1 and n. 36.

[21] Denys Turner summarises: 'We could not be rational if we were not also more than rational; human beings are not rational unless they are also intellectual', *Faith, Reason, and the Existence of God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 89.

[22] I am indebted to Colm McClemens ('The Distinction Intellectus-Ration in the Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas: A Historical and Critical Study' [unpublished doctoral dissertation, University College London, 1990]), quoted by Kevin O'Reilly in *Aesthetic Perception: A Thomist Perspective* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2007), p. 46.

[23] *ST* II-II, q.180, a.6 *ad* 2. Josef Pieper writes that contemplation is 'a type of knowing which does not merely move towards its object but already rests in it. The object is present – as a face or a landscape is present to the eye when the gaze "rests upon it"': *Happiness and Contemplation* (South Bend, IN: St Augustine Press, 1998), p. 74.

[25] III *Sent.* d.35 q.1, a.2 qc.2 s.c.

[26] *ST* II-II, q.180, a.3 *ad* 1.

[27] *ST* II-II, q.180. a.6 *ad* 2. Pieper, *Happiness and Contemplation*, p. 74 writes: 'The object is present – as a face or a landscape is present to the eye when the gaze "rests upon it"'.

[28] *ST* II-II, q. 59, a. 1: 'intellect and reason differ as to their manner of knowing; because the intellect knows by simple intuition (*simplici intuitu*), while reason knows by a process of discursion from one thing to another (*discurrendo de uno in aliud*)'. See also *ST* I, q.59, a.1 *ad* 1 and Pieper, *Happiness and Contemplation*, p. 74. Contemplation on earth represents an inchoate participation in the vision of God, which involves 'a participation in eternity, as completely transcending time'. In the vision of God, the action of the soul 'as joined to higher things which exist above time, participates in eternity': *Summa contra Gentiles*, ed. by Joseph Kenny, O.P., trans. by Anton C. Pegis and others, 4 vols. (New York: Hanover House, 1955–1957), III, p. 61). Contemplation on earth is a foretaste of this heavenly vision, as Aquinas mentions in *ST* II-II, q.180, a.4.

[29] *ST* I-II, q.3, a.5.

[30] *ST* II-II, q.182, a.1.

[31] Aquinas discusses the merits of games and play in *ST* II-II, q.168, a.2. He writes that words or deeds wherein nothing further is sought than the soul's delight are called playful or humorous (this is, of course, typical of contemplation, which is also pursued for its own sake). In *ST* I-II, q.1, a.6 *ad* 1 Aquinas had already written that playful actions (*actiones ludicrae*) are not directed towards an extrinsic end but merely to the good of the player (*ad bonum ipsius ludentis*). For feasting see *ST* II-II, q.182, a.1: 'The contemplative life is more enjoyable than the active. Thus Augustine says that Martha was troubled, while Mary feasted'. The reference is to Augustine's *Sermon* 103.3. For a translation, see *The Works of St Augustine*, trans. by Edmund Hill (Brooklyn, NY: New City Press, 1992), III/IV, pp. 76–80 (esp. p. 77).

[32] This theme is well-known (see *ST* I, q.84, a.7). For a discussion of Aquinas's epistemology and the role of phantasmata, see Robert Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 284–95.

[33] This dialogical notion of understanding coheres well in purely formal terms with the approach of disputed questions that characterise some of the key writings of medieval authors (objections, replies, etc.). From the *Commentary on the Sentences* and his several *Disputed Questions* to his *Summa Theologiae* Aquinas has adopted this dialogical style when developing his arguments.

[34] In his major work, *Truth and Method*, Gadamer had already used the notion of play to make clear a key aspect of his hermeneutics, namely that understanding is always 'an event of being'; or, as he puts it in the Preface to the second edition: 'My real concern was and is philosophic: not what we do or what we ought to do, but what happens to us over and above our wanting and doing' (*Truth and Method*, p. xxviii).

[35] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 106. In relation to modern art this implies that the audience can actively participate in making the art-event 'happen'.

[36] Gadamer, 'The Play of Art', pp. 123–30. The analogy with play is made for two reasons. First, as suggested earlier, it illustrates Gadamer's point that understanding (of a text, views expressed to us in a conversation, a work of art etc.) is not something purely subjective but, rather, in understanding we participate in an *event of disclosure*. Secondly, and related to this, in this instance it also assists us in making sense of modern art, in which the art-work tries to break down the barrier between the audience and the work of art.

[37] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, pp. 105–6.

[38] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 109.
[39] Gadamer, *Relevance*, p. 31; Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 153.
[40] Gadamer, *Relevance*, p. 32.
[41] Gadamer, *Relevance*, p. 33. In another essay, 'Aesthetic and Religious Experience', Gadamer makes the same point: 'We can define the symbol as that through which someone or something is known and recognised. [. . .] The recognition that the work of art procures for us is always an expansion of that infinite process of making ourselves at home in the world which is the human lot' (*Relevance*, pp. 140–53 [pp. 150–1]). In this context Gadamer discusses the notion of mimesis or imitation, which has nothing to do with imitation of something already familiar to us. Rather, 'it implies that something is represented in such a way that it is actually present in sensuous abundance' (*Relevance*, p. 36)
[42] Gadamer, *Relevance*, p. 34.
[43] Gadamer, *Relevance*, p. 34.
[44] Gadamer, *Relevance*, p. 42.
[45] Richard Palmer, *Gadamer in Conversation: Reflections and Commentary* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), pp. 76–7.
[46] Gadamer, Truth and Method, pp. 125–6.
[47] Gadamer, Truth and Method, pp. 124–5.
[48] This even applies to the artist himself, for whom the work of art has its own integrity, which stands before the artist as before anybody else.
[49] Gadamer, Truth and Method, p. 128.
[50] I have developed this theme elsewhere. See Rik Van Nieuwenhove, 'The Religious and Aesthetic Attitude', *Literature and Theology*, 18 (2004), 174–86.
[51] Rousselot, *L'Intellectualisme de saint Thomas*.
[52] Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. by C. I. Litzinger, O.P., 2 vols. (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1964), no. 1179.
[53] See the classic study by Denys Turner, *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). For an application of this approach to Ruusbroec, see Rik Van Nieuwenhove, *Jan van Ruusbroec: Mystical Theologian of the Trinity* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003).
[54] For an eloquent and highly readable overview, see Gordon Graham, *Philosophy of the Arts: An Introduction to Aesthetics* (London: Routledge, 2000).
[55] This is the title of a chapter in Jean Grondin's book on *The Philosophy of Gadamer*, trans. by Kathryn Plant (Chesham: Acumen, 2003). It is a reference to Friedrich Hölderlin's verse from *Friedensfeier* ('Viel hat von Morgen an, /Seit ein Gespräch wir sind und hören voneinander, / Erfahren der Mensch; bald sind wir aber Gesang'.) Gadamer comments on this verse, which captures a key tenet of his thought. See also Donatella Di Cesare, *Gadamer: A Philosophical Portrait* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007), pp. 158–63.